

AT THE WHITE HOUSE
WITH PIERRE SALINGER
SEPTEMBER 3, 1962
12:30 P.M. EDT
TUESDAY

MR. SALINGER: I have nothing.

Q. Do you have any comment on the Russian charge that a U-2 overflew the Soviet territory?

MR. SALINGER: No, I have no comment. I think, however, that the State Department will have something to say about it in the very near future.

Q. When?

MR. SALINGER: In the very near future.

Q. What about Senator Keating's comment about the Russia-Cuba build-up? It was announced that the White House would announce the inaccuracies later in the day.

MR. SALINGER: If we can deal with the U-2, then I will get on that.

Q. What do you mean by "the near future"?

MR. SALINGER: The next several hours.

Q. Has the President been in consultation with the State Department on it?

MR. SALINGER: The President is apprised of the situation.

Q. When was he informed, Pierre, and how?

MR. SALINGER: This morning. He was apprised this morning.

Q. Before he landed back here?

MR. SALINGER: No, I think when he landed he was told of the Soviet note.

Q. Pierre, can you tell us whether the spokesman in London, in the Air Force, who made the statement this morning, has been instructed to say more or say nothing from now on?

MR. SALINGER: I am going to say absolutely nothing on this subject.

Q. Why does the white house take such an

Q. Pierre, when the State Department puts out its answer --

MR. SALINGER: I didn't say they were going to put out their answer. I said they would have something to say about it.

Q. Will this be in the form of a written statement or will there be someone who can be questioned?

MR. SALINGER: I am sure there will be somebody present who can be questioned.

Q. Pierre, are we going to understand that the State Department is going to handle this inquiry?

MR. SALINGER: That is correct.

Q. Did your conference this morning with Mr. Manning and Mr. Sylvester have to do with the U-2 incident?

MR. SALINGER: It did not.

Q. Pierre, has the note been received here yet?

MR. SALINGER: I will refer you to the State Department on that.

Q. Is the State Department in consultation with other agencies so the answer will be coordinated?

MR. SALINGER: The State Department will handle this matter.

Q. The State Department, whatever their reaction or whatever they do publicly in this, they are serving as the spokesman for the Government in this whole matter?

MR. SALINGER: The State Department will make any statement they care to make.

Q. Pierre, will you explain to us why, on an incident of this kind, the White House has nothing to say, yet last week when a plane was allegedly shot at by a Cuban patrol boat, and the plane was flown by a Reserve pilot, and we only have his word that this happened, the White House saw fit to make a statement? What is the difference between these two incidents?

MR. SALINGER: The State Department will handle this matter.

Q. Pierre, can you tell us what the status of the U-2's are right now? Are they flying for NASA or the Air Force?

MR. SALINGER: Any statement on this matter will be made by the State Department.

Q. Aside from this matter --

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MR. SALINGER: I am going to say absolutely nothing on this subject.

Q. Not you. I am asking about the spokesman in London.

MR. SALINGER: I am not going to say anything about any other spokesman. In other words, I am not commenting on the situation, period.

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Q. Aside from this matter --

MR. SALINGER: I don't intend to say anything about it, Bob; not one single word.

Q. Is the President going to have a press conference this week?

MR. SALINGER: I don't know yet. I will let you know this afternoon.

Q. Pierre, who apprised the President of this?

MR. SALINGER: I believe Mr. Bundy did.

Q. Can you tell us what the Pentagon press officials were in here for?

MR. SALINGER: No.

Q. Pierre, in another field, what is the White House role, if any, in the action of the Armed Forces Radio broadcast in Iran? Have you called for any report on that? Have you received any reports on it?

MR. SALINGER: We have received a report on it and our information is that the hoax was perpetrated on the Armed Forces Radio in Teheran and we are looking into the matter.

Q. What was the hoax, Pierre?

MR. SALINGER: I refer you to the story that emanated from there.

Q. You say the hoax was perpetrated on the Armed Forces Radio?

MR. SALINGER: Yes.

Q. Now, about Senator Keating and the Cuban situation.

MR. SALINGER: I am going to discuss this subject for BACKGROUND only.

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Q. What is this?

MR. SALINGER: This is Senator Keating on Cuba.

First, I notice in the UP report that Senator Keating said a White House spokesman had called the studio and stated that the President or the White House would reply to Senator Keating's inaccuracies upon his return. That is inaccurate.

I called Mr. Chancellor and took exception with a statement he made at the opening of his broadcast in which he said that the President had stated that there were no Soviet military personnel in Cuba. The President did not state that.

A reading of his press conference remarks of last Wednesday will show what he did say on that subject.

As far as Mr. Keating's remarks about the numbers of technicians or ships, I see nothing in that matter which has not been made public by the Government before.

Q. Do you mean the figures he has seen?

(BACKGROUND)

MR. SALINGER: But what I am trying to point out is that there is nothing new or different about his statements on troops or ships.

Q. Then we have a question, don't we, of timing; which came first? Are we saying now that there are 5,000 Soviet troops which have landed in Cuba?

MR. SALINGER: I am not saying that at all. I don't think he said that.

Q. Keating said there were 1,200 Soviet troops.

MR. SALINGER: He has two different figures. Again, I want to remind you that everything on this Cuban thing is on BACKGROUND.

A reading of Senator Keating's statements on technicians and ships reveals nothing that has not been revealed before.

Q. Are you confirming that there are Soviet troops in Cuba? 1,200?

MR. SALINGER: I refer you to the President's statement last Wednesday. He made very clear what our information was at that time, and he also stated at that time if we had any other verified information on this subject we would make it public. That is our policy.

Q. There has been no change since last Wednesday; is that the idea?

MR. SALINGER: When and if we receive any further verified information dealing with movements of technicians, troops, or any other subject involving Soviet military aid to Cuba, we will make it public, as the President indicated.

Q. Aren't we in a peculiar situation here where you are discussing, as a Press Secretary, a remark by the President, and we can't --

MR. SALINGER: You can certainly quote the President's remarks at the press conference.

Q. But we are on BACKGROUND when you are discussing something the President said in the press conference.

MR. SALINGER: Certainly what the President said in the press conference is on the record.

Q. Smitty raised a vital point. The whole device of BACKGROUND, as we understand it, is to protect officials when they are dealing with delicate foreign policy matters.

MR. SALINGER: You don't think this is a delicate foreign policy matter?

Q. No. You are dealing with the Hill. It is a political matter.

MR. SALINGER: No.

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Q. Do you mean the figures he has are figures that have been made public by the Government?

MR. SALINGER: I couldn't tell you -- there may be variations of hundreds or so, but the general information that he made public has been made public by the Government before on the subject of troops and so on.

Q. In general, it is correct, the information?

Soviet troops which have landed in Cuba?

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MR. SALINGER: Maybe Senator Keating would like it to be.

Q. You have confirmed what he said, but you won't confirm it on the record.

MR. SALINGER: I am going to stand by what I said and by the rules under which I said it.

(BACKGROUND)

Q. What kind of BACKGROUND is this -- White House officials, Government spokesmen, or what?

MR. SALINGER: You can say White House officials.

Q. Pierre, hasn't the State Department, perhaps for background if not officially, put out various figures about the number of ships and personnel and so forth?

MR. SALINGER: That is correct, and I believe -- although I considered this a violation of the rule at the time, I believe that Mr. Wilson's question at the President's press conference last Wednesday was an indication of where some of this information came from.

Q. Pierre, the President, in his press conference, said that as far as we can say now, in the term as it is generally used, we do not know of any Russian troops in Cuba.

MR. SALINGER: As the word "troops" is generally understood; that is correct.

Q. Are we standing by that today?

MR. SALINGER: We are standing by that today.

Q. Despite what Keating said this morning?

MR. SALINGER: I believe we are having a semantical discussion.

Q. How do you define "troops"?

Q. You have used the words "technicians" and "ships." You have not used the word "troops."

MR. SALINGER: I am using the words that the President used in his press conference.

Q. Keating said the word "troops" there, in the commonly accepted term of "troops."

MR. SALINGER: I agree with what you said.

Q. I agree this is getting into a semantical big, but you said Keating did not disclose anything which had not been revealed before, and yet he used "troops" and you don't. Do you think there ought to be a separation there?

MR. SALINGER: I choose to stand by the language the President used in his press conference.

Q. Pierre, is it a correct interpretation for us to say that a high White House official disclosed today that he called the National Broadcasting Company and corrected something John Chancellor said? The same high White House official said --

(BACKGROUND)

Q. Pierre, how do you define "troops" and what is the difference between "troops" in your definition --

MR. SALINGER: I will not get into that definition with you, Bob.

Q. Isn't that the problem we are trying to straighten out here?

MR. SALINGER: I am going to stand by the language the President used. The situation on the broadcast this morning, if I could give you a comparison, would be of a Senator being interviewed on a television show and the Senator said, "Today is Tuesday," and the fellow interviewing him said, "Senator, that is an extraordinary statement." That is what happened this morning.

Q. Pierre, do you know whether the Russian soldiers are in Cuban uniforms in Cuba?

MR. SALINGER: I have said everything I am going to say on the subject.

Q. Pierre, this is a procedural subject. Could we please clear up now, because it has been going on 18 months, why you cannot allow this to be attributed to the White House Press Secretary?

MR. SALINGER: I have chosen to do it this way.

Q. Could you explain?

Q. You could put this off the record, if you like.

Q. Could you explain it?

MR. SALINGER: No, I don't think I am called upon to explain it.

Q. If we go out from here and write a story saying that the White House official today said there was nothing new that hadn't been previously reported about Keating's report that there were 5,000 troops in Cuba, this is not going to square with my understanding of what the President said. That is the point I am trying to belabor on this.

MR. SALINGER: Senator Keating chooses to use "troops" and we referred to them as "technicians," which is our information.

Q. You earlier used the words "military personnel."

MR. SALINGER: That is right, and the President in his own press conference stated there were military personnel in Cuba and had been for some time.

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MR. SALINGER: I am not going to tell you --

Q. I know you will not tell us how to write it. But under the ground rules, that is what you are saying.

MR. SALINGER: Under the ground rules, I would say you would say that a high White House official said that Pierre Salinger, the Press Secretary of the President, called.

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MR. SALINGER: That is right, and the President in his own press conference stated there were military personnel in Cuba and had been for some time.

Q. Would those be prisoners of war under the rules if they were captured, or civilians, or what?

MR. SALINGER: No, he made a specific reference to a Soviet military mission.

Q. I think besides what Keating said, Pierre, I keep trying to find out what is a "troop," what is a "soldier." Is a technician with a rifle a soldier?

MR. SALINGER: The President stated explicitly what our understanding of the situation was last Wednesday. When and if we have any new information, you can be sure we will make it public and it will not be for background. It will be on the record.

Q. Why does the White House take such an interest in one aspect of our foreign policy and refer to the State Department to take other aspects?

MR. SALINGER: If you ever end up sitting in this chair, you can take that up.

Q. I am not going to end up sitting there and you are sitting there now.

MR. SALINGER: You are a lucky fellow, too.

Q. Pierre, does this Administration have any plan for a total blockade of Cuba?

MR. SALINGER: I am not going to discuss the subject any further.

Q. Pierre, did you call Chancellor while he was still on the air or after he signed off?

MR. SALINGER: He was still on the air.

Q. What time was this?

MR. SALINGER: It was about 8:05 this morning.

Q. Did he change his statement?

MR. SALINGER: He changed his statement on the air afterwards.

Q. Who did he say called him?

MR. SALINGER: He didn't say who called him. He said "An error has been called to my attention and in a fast moving broadcast like this, sometimes we make errors," and he corrected what the President said.

Q. Are you satisfied with his statement?

MR. SALINGER: Totally satisfied.

Q. There has been reference to British ships carrying supplies to Cuba.

MR. SALINGER: That question also came up at last Wednesday's broadcast.

Q. Pierre, I am handicapped, not having seen this broadcast.

MR. SALINGER: You are not really handicapped.

Q. We are all cleared up on troops and tech-

(BACKGROUND)

MR. SALINGER: Again, I am not going further. I stand on what I said.

Q. You are agreeing with Keating?

MR. SALINGER: If you read the transcript of what he said, you can see the context in which he used the figures.

Q. Did the President see the broadcast?

MR. SALINGER: He did not see the broadcast, nor did I talk to the President before I talked to Mr. Chancellor.

Q. Are there any Chinese troops in Cuba? I am not kidding. Naval officers at Guantanamo said there are.

MR. SALINGER: I have said everything I am going to say on the situation.

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Q. Can you say anything about the situation in West Berlin, the movement of armored cars?

MR. SALINGER: No.

Q. Pierre, another happy field, what is your attitude toward the Bolivian President cancelling his trip to the United States because of the sale of tin out of our stockpile?

MR. SALINGER: That is a subject which we are studying at the present time, and I would think we would have something to say about that later.

Q. You would think?

MR. SALINGER: Yes.

Q. Like today?

MR. SALINGER: It is possible.

(BACKGROUND)

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Q. Pierre, to clarify the semantic problem on the "troops" or "military technicians," could the military mission in Cuba be compared with our military advisors in South Viet Nam?

MR. SALINGER: I will let you draw that comparison yourself.

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MR. SALINGER: You are not really handicapped.

Q. We are all cleared up on troops and technicians, I see, but what about this question of number? The President didn't use any number, regardless of what kind of persons they are.

MR. SALINGER: Other Government agencies have used numbers.

Q. They say Keating used two different numbers, 1,200 and 5,000. Which is the Government saying it is?

Q. Aside from this matter --

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Q. In another field, is the President contemplating a nonpolitical or political trip to New Hampshire?

MR. SALINGER: There is no scheduled trip to New Hampshire at the present time. There are two Senate seats up in New Hampshire and I would not be surprised to see the President go to New Hampshire before the campaign is out.

Q. Would that be sometime near to the 18th when he votes in Massachusetts?

MR. SALINGER: I couldn't tell you that now.

Q. Pierre, for technical reasons, can we expect the State Department statement on the U-2 before lunch?

MR. SALINGER: That is possible.

Q. What was the question?

MR. SALINGER: The question was whether you might expect the U-2 statement from the State Department before lunch. It depends how late you eat lunch, really.

Q. Have you any more jollies?

Q. No, I am clear.

END